



## SAN DIEGO STATE AZTECS MEDIA RELATIONS

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### **San Diego State Men's Basketball Press Conference September 26, 2017**

#### **SDSU men's basketball head coach Brian Dutcher**

##### **On being the head coach:**

"It's kind of an exciting time for me. Year 19 on campus and first year to run my first official practice as head coach, and we'll do that on Friday. Super excited for that opportunity and the team has worked extremely hard in the fall. We did a boot camp this year, got them up early in the morning, did a lot of stuff without a basketball and then did a lot of shooting. [We're] trying to get the ball to go in the basket a little more this year and the kids have responded great. I think we're all excited to start official practice on Friday leading into our first game which I think is November 10<sup>th</sup> against San Diego Christian. We're healthy and our seniors will provide great leadership. Trey Kell, Malik Pope and the addition of Kameron Rooks have set the tone and the rest of the team has responded. The Aztecs are ready to take the floor and get ready for another exciting season."

##### **On the personality of a Brian Dutcher coached team:**

"I've always been a positive person, so hopefully it's that positive energy. It's not looking at it as the glass half full. If a shot doesn't go in, let's not worry about that, just make the next one. We're getting good opportunities, let's take advantage of them. So I think I'm trying to bring a positive energy not unlike coach [Steve] Fisher brought, but in my own way."

##### **On any extra nerves, knowing that he now runs the program:**

"Yeah, there is a little bit more excitement for me. I always felt like I contributed at practice and was a part of everything we did, but to step out there and be the final voice on everything is kind of exciting. It keeps me up a little bit more at night trying to find a way to word things - it's not the message, it's the way you deliver it. I think about ways to deliver a message that help us understand and try to help them get better. That's my job as a coach, to help all these individual pieces get better but at the same time build them into a cohesive team. I'm excited for that opportunity and the challenge of doing that."

##### **On what the team has to do to get back to the postseason:**

"Win close games. I always remember, Coach Fisher would always say and it's true, the difference between winning and losing is this much. And that's the case. I think we all remember the years we went on that streak where if we had a lead in the last five minutes, we never lost a game. We started losing some of those game and some of it's coaching, some of it lies on us, some of it lies on players performing down the stretch. I think if we all take that responsibility, we'll all climb that step and start winning close games. I think the thing we all know is the games are going to go to the last five minutes. You think back to the conference tournament against Colorado State, a couple of calls here and there, a couple plays and maybe we're playing for the conference title against Nevada and going to an NCAA tournament last year. The difference is not great between winning and losing and we have to find a way to take that last step to start closing out games again."

**On how to find consistency for senior forward Malik Pope and junior guard Montaque Gill-Caesar's games:**

"Malik Pope, I think he missed nine games last year due to injury, so it's hard to get a consistency about you when you're always coming back from injury. Malik had a great summer and a great fall where he really put the work in and he's at full strength right now even though he had a high ankle sprain near the end of the summer, he's battled back from that and he's full speed, full go. So I think a healthy Malik Pope will mean a great season for the Aztecs. You learn a lesson every year and I think Malik has gotten better freshman to sophomore, sophomore to junior and now junior to senior year. There are times when we watch Malik play and he's the best player on the floor and an NBA-type player. Now we have to add the consistency where it's that way every night for him so we have to put him into position to do that. In regards to [Montaque Gill-Caesar], he's had a great summer and fall. Sometimes opportunity leads to your success and he played behind Dakari Allen, a senior, and behind Matt Shrigley, a senior, so he didn't get a lot of minutes. When he did get in last year, I thought he pressed his game a little bit and there were times the ball went in and he looked great but there were times the ball wasn't going in and it was easy to go back to the starter. I think the opportunity he'll have this year will give him a peace of mind and he can come out and play a little more relaxed and know that his contribution is going to be greater over a greater period of time. I think that will help both him and our Aztec team."

**On the balance now that he has filled some holes in the roster this offseason:**

"Yeah, I think the holes we plugged are interesting because we have 12 on the team and six of them are new to the playing floor. We had two redshirts, Devon Watson, obviously a local kid who had great success at University of San Francisco — averaged 20 points, five assists — Jalen McDaniels, a 6'9" freshman from Seattle who redshirted last year and we really debated whether we were going to play Jalen last year or not, it was that close. So I think the sit out year from him was great, I think he put on 20 pounds. So both those guys are new to the program even though they've been in the program, so we're excited to add them. Then we talk about the three freshmen, we have Adam Seiko from a winning program, we have Jordan Schakel from a CIF and state title team, [and] we have Matt Mitchell from a CIF and state title team. So, we have three freshmen that come from winning programs and I don't think there's any replacement for that. They're used to winning, they know what it takes to win and they know what it's like to play with other great players where they're not just the only player on the team. I think they fit right in because they're not coming in to say 'I have to do this to get on the floor,' they know how to make other players better but at the same time add worth to the floor with their own abilities. And then Kameron Rooks, what program has greater success with fifth-year seniors than the Aztecs? I think Kameron is another one in those lines, a 7'1" local kid that adds the size that you don't see anywhere else from us. We have athleticism, but he might be the missing piece size-wise. At 7'1" he's a space-eater, he's experienced — he had a great career and experience at Cal — but we're fortunate to have him for hopefully his most productive year, that fifth year on the floor for us. So we're excited about all the new pieces. The returners, we returned three starters. Jeremy Hemsley, who was Freshman of the Year in the conference and had a nice sophomore year and is ready for a nice junior year. Trey Kell, who was first team all-conference two years ago and like we tell him, as the team wins the benefits grow for everybody. So Trey had a very good junior year, but we didn't win the conference so he dropped to I think maybe third team. And then Malik Pope, who's come back from injury to have a productive summer. We had Nolan Narain, who is good enough to play but didn't have the minutes to play because he got caught up in the depth chart. I tell the guys as a coach, ideally, you only want about nine guys on scholarship because usually you're not going to play more than nine, so you're going to have three guys that aren't getting any minutes that are good enough to play. But I said unfortunately guys get hurt so a coach can't go with a nine-man roster because you're going to have a guy that's sick, a guy get injured, so we have 12 on the roster. And I'll tell you this, all 12 we have on the roster can play and they're very good. So now it's up to us to figure out what combination works best for the Aztecs. The summer is for developing your game individually, the fall as we start official practice is about getting the team better. So now all our efforts are in finding what combination will find the greatest success for the Aztecs."

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